



Centre for excellence  
for Children's Care and Protection

# The Virtual School Head Teachers' and Care Experienced Teams' Network

Terms of Reference

August 2021



[www.celcis.org](http://www.celcis.org)

*building brighter futures*

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*"We create opportunities for care experienced learners to grow at every age and stage of their lives from birth to adulthood"*





## Context

All children have a right to an education. For children and young people with care experience this may mean that additional support is required during their time in school to meet their distinct, and often unseen, needs. One of the key goals of [Virtual School Head Teachers' \(VSHT\) and Care Experienced Teams \(CET\) Network](#) is to help create environments where care experienced children feel more settled, motivated, and resilient, to ensure a better experience at school. This, in turn, will help to improve attendance, educational outcomes, and contribute to better life chances.

A 'Virtual School' is an organisational framework that offers an additional layer of support for the education of care experienced students through one person or team. There is surprisingly little in the research literature that explicitly refers to Virtual Schools, Virtual School Head Teachers or Care Experienced Teams. The Virtual School also describes the cohort of care experienced young people that 'belong' to the local authority but attend a range of 'bricks and mortar' schools, including a significant number living out of authority. VSHTs and CETs understand the attendance, attainment and progress of care experienced children and young people and work with a range of partners to improve their educational experience.

VSHTs and CETs are senior members of education staff in a local authority who work at a strategic level. The role is different to but is key in supporting that of the Designated Manager; a senior member of staff in every education establishment who has overall responsibility for the planning of assessment and support for care experienced children and young people. Network members responsibilities focus on supporting the improvement of the educational experiences and outcomes of care experienced children and young people in the whole local authority area. Members also provide key links between multi-agency teams and advocate for the needs and rights of care experienced children and young people.

## Amendment and Changes

All terms of reference, including vision statements and values should and will change over time. These terms of reference will be amended annually after consultation with group members. Minor variations and updates can be addressed by members through network meetings. This document is an amended version based upon a business meeting held with the network in June 2021.

## Vision

### Vision for Scotland's care experienced learners

The vision of the Network's is that Scotland is a country where everyone gets a quality education, dreams big and goes on to study, work and live well. Care experienced learners thrive in education and we are ambitious about what they can achieve. We give everyone what they need to do well at every stage of their lives. Scotland creates multiple opportunities for all learners to grow whatever their circumstances.

### Vision for the network

The vision of the Network is that we play a crucial part in creating a country where everyone gets a quality education and goes on to study, work and live well. We make a difference by working alongside those with care experience to turn the ambitions of The Promise into the reality of practice. We create opportunities by connecting with those who live with, teach and support our children and young people. We will never give up in our determination to shape a compassionate education system that creates multiple opportunities for all, whatever their circumstances. The Network models how an effective care system works to support the education of care experienced young people.

## Our values

Equity	<p>We support learners to thrive in education.</p> <p>We create multiple opportunities at every age and stage.</p> <p>We advocate, challenge and support to ensure fairness.</p>
Connection	<p>We listen to and are led by care experienced learners.</p> <p>We build relationships with those who live, support and teach our children and young people.</p> <p>We network across systems to create pathways to success.</p>
Compassion	<p>We hold the hands of those holding the hands of our children.</p> <p>We make a difference by taking action above and beyond expectations.</p> <p>Our work is driven by a commitment to do what a good parent would do.</p>

## Aims

CELCIS convened this group with the original purpose of bringing together representatives from local authorities alongside Education Scotland and Scottish Government with a view to having a broader perspective of the work of Virtual Schools. It was envisaged that learning would be shared across the sector and to give members access to policy, research and practice to inform their approach. There was an explicit desire to develop an evidenced based understanding of the unique core components of a VSHT and CET.

- To think collectively and co-construct ways to improve the education of care experienced learners
- To provide peer support in a new and evolving role
- To create a safe, reflective place to share good practice

## Objectives

- To improve the education experiences and outcomes of care experienced children and young people
- To put the voices, values and aspirations of care experienced children and young people at the centre of our work
- To work with care experienced children, young people, their teachers and carers, to realise the ambitions of The Promise
- To support and encourage each other, and to share knowledge and experiences that enable the network to respond quickly to the needs of children and young people
- To generate and share evidence of good practice

## Our way of working

The Network is a safe space to share information and ideas and a place where questions, curiosities and discussion are encouraged. A variety of methods are used to include members, encourage debate, collect ideas and share views. The network has agreed to shared values and core principles to underpin how it functions and operates. The following principles have been reviewed and agreed:

- The Network is a safe space to share information and ideas
- Questions and discussions are encouraged
- Getting to know each other and building relationships is key to our work
- Consistency of membership helps to build relationships
- There is no expectation to attend every meeting

## Group functioning

The Network has worked hard to build relationships and create a safe space and the conditions for collaboration despite the pandemic. In order to maintain the ethos of the group, contribute to efficient organisation and respect pressures on time the network agreed that:

- CELCIS will convene, host and chair network meetings and provide the infrastructure to support the work
- Each local area will have one representative from their team who will ordinarily attend network meetings.
- Members will accept/decline calendar invites
- If a member cannot attend they will let CELCIS know
- If a member would like a colleague to attend in their place this will be discussed with a member of the CELCIS team and agreed in advance
- Meeting invites will not be forwarded to other colleagues without prior discussion and agreement with CELCIS
- Any standing change in membership will be discussed and the new member will be offered the same support as newly joining members
- If a member is unable to make three meetings in a row a meeting will be arranged with CELCIS to discuss ongoing involvement and any necessary support required

## Frequency and format

The Network is hosted by CELCIS. It takes place remotely for two hours every month. The group, in line with public health arrangements, will review this meeting medium and frequency with a view to returning to a hybrid approach when guidance allows. The sessions are not recorded but a written note of the discussion is distributed electronically following the discussion. Should there be an intention to record the session for any reason, consent will be sought from all members prior to doing so.

## Joining the Network

Any local authority who wishes to join the network should discuss their role with CELCIS. These discussions will ensure that the role being taken forward in the local authority has a specific focus on the education of care experienced learners. It will also highlight the network's ethos, way of working and the expectations of members.

CELCIS will offer an invitation to join if the work and role is aligned with that of the network. It is good practice for members to seek permission from the relevant lead in their local authority prior to joining.

All new members will be inducted into the Network through a follow up meeting with CELCIS. They will be introduced to members by email, sent the notes of the most recent meeting, the terms of reference and the dates of future meetings, and will be asked whether they'd like to add details about their role to the CELCIS VSHT webpage.

## Meeting notes and confidentiality

A detailed note of discussions are produced and distributed to all members following a network meeting with headlines and a summary of actions highlighted at the beginning. Any amendment requests to the note will be responded to by CELCIS. Notes are anonymised to protect the confidentiality of group members and encourage a spirit of free discussion.

Members may disseminate information to their own organisation or networks but ensure they follow in-house procedures for this and any confidentiality agreements with other members of the network. During the course of any discussion members may highlight an issue as confidential and it will be subject to scrutiny and the members' approval before being shared. Being part of the distribution list means consenting to a member's email address being disseminated to the group and therefore should a member wish this to no longer be the case they should inform CELCIS.

## Membership

The membership as of August 2021:

- 1 Aberdeen City Council
- 2 Aberdeenshire Council
- 3 Argyll and Bute Council
- 4 CELCIS (Host)
- 5 Dumfries and Galloway Council
- 6 Dundee City Council
- 7 East Lothian Council
- 8 Edinburgh City Council
- 9 Education Scotland
- 10 Fife Council
- 11 Glasgow City Council
- 12 The Highland Council
- 13 Midlothian Council
- 14 North Lanarkshire Council
- 15 Renfrewshire Council
- 16 Scottish Borders Council
- 17 Scottish Government
- 18 Stirling Council
- 19 South Ayrshire Council

## Resources

CELCIS has been granted funding from Scottish Government to facilitate the Network until March 2022. This funding covers internal CELCIS expenditure for personnel and infrastructure costs including evaluation. At this time there is no budget which is available to cover any local authority member's expenses. Any travel or expenses involved in participation in the Network would require to be agreed within a member's own organisation. However, at this time, this is not applicable due to the use of a digital platform.

## Schedule of work

Month	Date	Area of focus agreed/objectives
August	31 <sup>st</sup>	Terms of ref sign-off/plan for year
September	23 <sup>nd</sup>	The Promise and Change Plan
October	27 <sup>th</sup>	Exclusions
November	25 <sup>th</sup>	Post school destinations
December	16 <sup>th</sup>	Sharing practice
January	26 <sup>th</sup>	Out of authority
February	24 <sup>th</sup>	UNCRC
March	31 <sup>st</sup>	Self-evaluation/school improvement

### **About CELCIS**

CELCIS is a leading improvement and innovation centre in Scotland. We improve children's lives by supporting people and organisations to drive long-lasting change in the services they need, and the practices used by people responsible for their care.

### **For more information**

**Visit:** [www.celcis.org](http://www.celcis.org) **Email:** [celcis@strath.ac.uk](mailto:celcis@strath.ac.uk) **Tel:** 0141 444 8500